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MINORITY REPORT

FROM THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Upon Resolutions touching the conduct of the War and the tender of conciliatory measures to the inhabitants of the North-western States.

The undersigned, a minority of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, beg leave to dissent from the report of the majority upon certain resolutions referred to the committee touching the conduct of the war and recommending the issuing, by the President, of a proclamation to the inhabitants of the North-western States, tendering to them the free navigation of the Mississippi river, and advantageous treaty stipulations at the close of the war.

It is submitted that subjects relating to the conduct of the war are not appropriate matters of investigation by the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

But waiving this consideration, the undersigned totally dissent from the views of the majority touching the duties of this House. It is a work of supererogation for this body to undertake to decide, and to declare, the mode of conducting the war. It is a question involving consequences of vital moment, legitimately pertaining to the functions of the Executive and those who have been chosen to lead our armies. But if such duty were in fact devolved upon this body, as is implied by the report of the majority, it would be in violation of all the rules of enlightened warfare to unfold the plan which it is designed to pursue in the prosecution of the war.

It is believed that thus far the Executive has availed himself of the means placed at his disposal for conducting the war in the manner most judicious and effective; and that in the signal success which has attended our struggle for the maintenance of the independence of the Confederate States, will be found sufficient reason for leaving him, without interference, to the exercise of the duties imposed by the Constitution.

The undersigned dissent from the recommendation that this Government should tender to a portion of the citizens of the Government with whom we are at war, exclusive commercial privileges. It is not the part of wisdom to commit our Government to any fixed policy in

advance. Legislation should not be anticipated but should be shaped by existing events. If a deviation from this plain suggestion of wisdom be advised in the present instance upon the idea of the influence of an appeal to the self-interest of the inhabitants of the Northwestern States, it should not be forgotten that the same argument might, with equal propriety, be addressed to the inhabitants of the New England States. The manufacturers of that section would be conciliated by pledges that a discriminating tariff would, at the close of hostilities be put into speedy operation for building up their interests; and shipowners would be propitiated by pledges that they would be permitted to perform the carrying trade of the South as under the old Union. And the city of New York would be induced to pause in her course of folly and wickedness, towards the Confederate States, if assured that they would confer upon her the privilege of conducting their commercial affairs and enriching herself upon the proceeds of their labor.

The Northern people derived, under the former government, an annual profit of not less than an $100,000,000 upon Southern trade. Their implements of war will be laid aside when assured that their coffers shall be filled with the proceeds of Southern labor. But the undersigned do not hesitate to repel the suggestion that the people of the South are willing to purchase peace by such a sacrifice of their rights, and by so degrading a concession to Northern cupidity. To be respected, our course must be firm, and our legislation rational and just.

At an early period after the organization of the Government of the Confederate States, a law was passed declaring the free navigation of the Mississippi River, with certain salutary restrictions. The policy of the Government has not been changed on this subject. It is presumed to have been known to the inhabitants of the Northwestern States before they embarked in a wicked and unjustifiable war against the people of the Confederate States. To proclaim this policy at the present time, coupled with offers of lucrative trade, in the manner suggested by the majority, would be, in the highest degree, derogatory to the dignity of this Government. It would bring upon it the imputation of pusillanimity. It would be accepted by the enemy as a confession of conscious weakness, and its inevitable tendency would be to prolong the war.

The undersigned are firm in the opinion that the most effective mode of conquering a peace is not to be found in extending to the enemy propositions of reconciliation, but in the vigorous prosecution of the war.

The signs of returning reason, indicating a desire for peace among the inhabitants of the Northwestern States, upon the discovery of which the majority have congratulated the House, are believed to be delusive. The undersigned regret to say that they have not been able to discern them. But in the event of the actual existence of these alleged pacific indications, it is clear that they are the result, not of temporising expedients on the part of the Government of the Confederate States, but of its manifestation of purpose to prosecute the war with vigor and effect.

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For these reasons the undersigned dissent from the views of the majority, and ask the concurrence of the House in the opinion that they should be rejected.

E. BARKSDALE,
J. R. McLEAN,
W. R. SMITH.

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